

INDIA'S CULTURE AS A SUBJECT IN PRAGUE UNIVERSITIES

BY PROF. OTTO STEIN, PH.D.

I

The Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata's* kind invitation to write some lines on the position of the Indian culture in the Universities in Czechoslovakia coincides happily with the celebration of the 70th birthday of one of the most impressive and authoritative interpreters and ardent admirers of India's contributions to the world-culture,—of our Guru, Professor Winternitz. I say “our Guru,” because one dares say so, as the author of the standard work, *The History of Indian Literature*, has taught so many students, here and abroad, the wealth and beauty of the genius of Bharatavarsha.

But, let me begin with the beginning !

Since 1860 the professorships of classical philology and comparative linguistics have been trusted to the late Prof. Alfred Ludwig, Ph.D., who became professor of the latter subject in 1871, then on the single University, existing in Prague, common to both the peoples of the country Bohemia, a part of the Austrian Empire. In 1883 the University of Prague was divided into two, a Czech and a German University; Prof. Ludwig belonged to the latter.

Besides his many contributions to the science of language, classical and oriental, the name of Prof. Ludwig is associated with one of the chief works of Vedic research, with the six volumes of the first translation of the Rgveda into German. (By an often occurring duplicity of events, in 1876 was published the first volume of the metrical German translation of that

Veda by Grassmann, the second volume in 1877). Of these six volumes only the first two (1876) contain the prose translation of all the 1028 hymns of the Rgveda, arranged according to the deities to whom they are addressed and further according to their liturgical or general cultural contents. The individuality of Ludwig, already expressed in that deviation from the traditional arrangements in Mandalas, shows another feature in his handling of German orthography—he insists on a phonetical writing—as well as of his language. Indeed, the reading of this translation may be sometimes rather a work of study even for a reader whose mother tongue is German. But Ludwig did not intend to give a fluent and pleasant translation, which becomes, more or less, an imperfect reproduction of the really inimitable poesy of inspired sages.

He supplied, however, to that translation a commentary in two volumes (IV and V, 1881, resp. 1883), dedicated to the pace-maker of Vedic Studies, to Friedrich Max Muller of Oxford, a German by birth too, while the third volume (1878) under the title *The Mantra-literature and Ancient India, being an introduction to the translation of the Rgveda* brought an exhaustive inquisition into practically every point of the complex “Veda.” Needless to say that there are to be found chapters on the origin of Vedic literature, on metres, on the history of the text, on the personal names besides those of the poets, on the chronology of the Veda: rather

this volume is a gazetteer of Vedic culture, thus preceding by one year the highly appreciated work by Heinrich Zimmer: *Ancient Indian Life* (1879). As an appendix Ludwig included verses from the Samaveda, not contained in the Samhita of the Rik, and—as the first of all—a German translation of selected hymns from the Atharvaveda. Finally, an index volume (VI., 1888) of 265 pages shows every passage, discussed in his commentary or quoted, his conjectures made in the traditional text, and offers not only a glossary, but gives also what one may call today an alphabetical list of the materials in the Rgveda, with explanations again, quoting also analogous passages from the Atharvaveda and the Mahabharata. The end of this rich index brings the most important features of the Vedic language.

I have dealt perhaps too long on the description of that translation by Prof. Ludwig; the respect, however, for this ingenious work and its importance compels one to save it from undeserved oblivion, especially as it is less known in India perhaps.

II

When Prof. Ludwig retired in 1901, his successor on the chair of Indian Philology and Ethnology was Dr. Winternitz. Since 1883, as remarked, there were already two Universities in Prague, a Czech and a German one. On the former the subject of Sanskrit and comparative philology have been trusted since 1885 to a pupil of the late Prof. Ludwig, to Professor Josef Zubaty, Ph.D., who was born on April 20, 1855, and died on March 21, 1931. As his teacher, Zubaty also began his scientific activities with the Rgveda, in a paper "Contributions to the interpretation of the Rksamhita" (Listy filologické, 1893).

Besides his manifold researches into comparative Indo-European, especially Slavonic philology, he devoted his linguistic abilities to the great questions of Indian literature: to the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, to the metres in the former, to the problem of the influence of the Greek drama, i.e. the so-called new Attic comedy, on the development of the Indian drama. Finally, to put here aside all his valuable linguistic and lexicographical papers, mainly from the point of view of Slavonic or Czech languages, there may be mentioned his translations of the *Malavikagnimitra* and of the *Meghaduta* into Czech.

In the last year of the 19th century, 1899, Dr. Winternitz joined the German University of Prague. He, born on 23rd of December, 1863, was a pupil of the great George Buehler, but soon after his Ph.D. in 1888 he left his home in Austria and lived for ten years, till 1898, in Oxford, where he assisted the famous Friedrich Max Muller in bringing out the second edition of the Rgveda with Sayana's commentary. Already as a young doctor he had published the text of the Apastambiya Grhyasutra (1887), ten years later, in 1897, supplemented by the edition of the *Mantrapatha*. His chief work in that period, growing out from his never neglected interests for the religious, ritual and domestic life of ancient India, was the ritual of ancient Indian marriage-customs, compared with those of other Indo-European peoples (1892). As a pupil of the linguist and ethnographer Friedrich Muller—not to be confounded with the above-mentioned Fr. Max Muller—Dr. Winternitz was always an ethnologist too. To give one instance: he made researches into the deluge-stories of different peoples, a problem, in which Indologists are interested as

the story is to be found in the *Brahmana of the Hundred Paths*.

It is not the proper place here to give an exhaustive biography or description of the scholarly works of Prof. Winternitz.¹ What may be pointed out in general lines is his importance for promulgating the knowledge of India. His three volumes of Indian literary history, of which the first volume appeared in English garb, brought up to date, in 1927, while the second volume, containing the Buddhist and Jain literature, will be in the hands of the English reading public before long, are too familiar, not only to specialists, to be alluded at all. When he was happy to work as a guest-professor of the Visvabharati-University of Rabindranath Tagore at Santiniketan, he delivered lectures at various Universities, especially at the one in Calcutta, which have been published in a book under the title : *Some Problems of Indian Literature* (1925). Prof. Winternitz, as mentioned already, is an ethnologist : therefore are his many papers on ethnological topics. He is interested in religious questions : therefore his contributions to the history of Indian religions. He is since long a champion for the emancipation of women : therefore his activities in that field also. All this, besides his own and main field of Indology. But, that is the most remarkable feature of his personality as a scholar : that intrinsic co-inherence of all those different subjects which each other fructify.

One example of the relation between ethnology and Indology has been shown above ; how intimately connected his interests are another instance may illustrate. Since his years in Oxford he was

the enthusiastic advocate of progress in the women-movement ; to-day, it is true, that it seems to be an obsolete banality ; but it was not, if one remembers the fights of the suffragettes some 80 years back. Thus Prof. Winternitz who wrote in his early days on marriage customs or on the matrimony of the Jews, writes a paper on the position of the widow in the Veda, publishes a book *The Woman in Indian Religions* Part first, treating with Brahmanism only, or *Woman and War in the Light of Ethnology*.

One of the prominent activities of Prof. Winternitz from the beginning of his career was the propagation of the idea that Indology needs a critical text of the Mahabharata. After a long and eventful battle with men and circumstances to the latter of which belong the battles on real battle-fields too, he enjoys the satisfaction to see his beloved idea take shape in the motherland of the Epic under the guidance of the Mahabharata Editorial Committee among whose members his name also appears. He himself is preparing the edition of the Sabha-parvan.

Prof. Winternitz, however, has never been an Indologist of the writing-table. He gave not only to many an auditory, in the lecture-rooms in and outside the University, the best impressions of India's mental achievements, but he always tried to bring nearer the greatest men of that country to his own countrymen. Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, Mahatma Gandhi are the persons to whom he lent his able pen ; with the first he is connected by friendship, the last is the subject of a special booklet, besides many contributions to dailies. Just some days ago Prof. Winternitz read a lecture before a big auditory on India and the West, in which he pointed out that the future of human culture will depend on the

¹ A full bibliography has been given in the *Archiv Orientalni*, vol. VI, Number 1, dedicated to Prof. Winternitz on behalf of the Oriental Institute in Prague.

answer to the question: whether India will learn from the West its technical progress and with that the consequences of an unmerciful struggle of life, or whether the West will be taught by India the noble path of Ahimsa.

Many societies, not concerned with Indology, but with no less sociological aims, welcomed the idea of honouring Prof. Winternitz on the 23rd of December, 1933, by presenting him a volume of papers. Besides the friends from Europe and America many sons of India came to join us mentally. I am sure that those contributions from India will be the purest joy of the jubilant. The sad conditions forced the editors to reduce the number of papers, as they themselves renounced to participate in favour of other contributors; the papers, not printed in the volume, will be handed over to Prof. Winternitz and printed later on.

III

The chair of the late Prof. Zubaty was, because of the impossibility to unite such vast subjects like Indology and comparative linguistics and Indo-European languages in one scholar's hands, divided into two: the professorship of Indology could not be trusted to better hands than to those of Prof. Vincenc Lesny, Ph.D. Born on April 8, 1882, he studied in Prague in both the Universities, and visited also Germany and England. His interests have never been limited to ancient India alone, though he has done valuable services in that field also. But he devoted many a paper to middle-Indian languages and he is—a fact to be remembered—one of the few Indologists who are able to read the poems of the *poeta laureatus* of India in the latter's mother tongue. The translations into Czech profit by that elimination of the usual English

intermediary. Prof. Lesny was twice in India. He wrote not only the "India of To-day" (1924), but tries also to teach the truths of India to his countrymen in *The Spirit of India* (1927). He also wrote an important book on Buddhism (1921). Thus we see in him a second propagator of India's culture in Czechoslovakia.

Though, perhaps he does not call himself an Indologist, Prof. Otakar Pertold, Ph.D., who knows India and Ceylon not only from many visits, but also from three years' stay as a Consul for Czechoslovakia in Bombay, has done much in pointing out the beauties of India's culture and civilization to the public in big volumes. He is interested also in the popular religions of India as well as in the dances and magic of Ceylon. He, (born March 21, 1884) threw already by his papers many interesting side-lights on the pre-Aryan religion of India.

IV

Taking into account the Czechoslovakian Republic as a state of some 15 millions of inhabitants one must confess that in her Universities the representation of India's culture—for completeness I must mention myself—can hardly be called inadequate, adding that Indology is not fostered by some egoistic motifs or is not a special lucrative source for those who devote their life to her. We must rather appreciate the idealism and the economy of work by which it is able to reconstruct, from thousands of miles away, the complex edifice of culture what we call India. In *The Archiv Orientální*, the journal of the Oriental Institute of Prague, these efforts got an organ as also in the *Indologica Pragensia*, edited by Prof. Winternitz and the writer of these lines, devoted exclusively to Indology.

Let me conclude with the fervent wish and hope that some young students of India may share the enthusiasm which we feel here for India, and join us in

our Universities, to work for the promotion of science, which is the only source of progress and wealth, the only tie pure and ever-lasting between men.

AN AXIOM

BY R. KRISHNASWAMY AIYAR, M.A., B.L.

I

Lord Sri Krishna enunciates this in his Gita as a well-known axiom: "Death is verily certain for whatever is born." As with all axioms, this proposition has to be accepted as true and universal and requires no proof; but proof in the sense of verification is possible; if we consider the nature of things in the world before us, we cannot find a single thing which is born but does not die. It may be that some things last longer than others but it cannot be denied that there is an end to all things born.

All religions in the world without a single exception postulate as the final goal of life a state of existence which is salvation or liberation from the imperfect life of ours. There is much difference of opinion as regards the nature of that state, whether we have embodiments even then, whether our experience there is sensual or super-sensual, whether individuality subsists or not in that state, whether it is within the bounds of matter or beyond it, and so on. But all are agreed that that state is a state of continued eternal existence, that it is a state of supreme illumination where there is no room for darkness or ignorance, and that it is a state of ineffable Joy where there is no mixture of pain or sorrow. To use the terms of the Vedanta, the ultimate

goal of life postulated by all religions is a state of *Sat* (unqualified Existence), *Chit* (unqualified Knowledge) and *Ananda* (unqualified Bliss).

Now, no religion tolerates for a moment the suggestion that a person who has attained salvation can again become subject to the limitations of our life. If such a possibility were open, salvation would cease to be the "goal" of life and would cease to attract any aspirant. It is therefore accepted on all hands that once a person attains salvation he attains it once for all and continues in that state of illumination and joy *for ever*. That state once attained lasts for ever onwards.

II

We need hardly say that, at present, situated as we are in the midst of pain and sorrow, darkness and ignorance, *we* cannot claim to be in a state of liberation. To us, therefore, the state of liberation is something which has to be *attained* hereafter by appropriate effort. The state of liberation has to be created for us as the result of our exertions in that direction.

But the axiom with which we started is emphatic in proclaiming that whatever is caused cannot endure for ever. How then can a state of illumination which is the *result* of our exertion